

United States Senate Youth Program
49th Annual Washington Week
March 5-12, 2011
Essays from Montana Delegates

Krista Bailey attended Billings West High School in Billings, Montana

The United States Senate Youth Program was a terrific experience. One of the past participants from my school, Tyler Dugger, told me it would be the greatest week of my life but I did not realize how sincere he was until I arrived in Washington, D.C. We were given such an incredible opportunity with all the places we were able to see and all the inspiring people who took time out of their busy schedule[s] to come talk to us and personally answer our questions. On the day that President Obama talked to us, I was happier than I could have ever imagined and I felt extremely privileged and honored to be selected for this esteemed group.

Besides all that we learned and saw, one of the greatest aspects of the trip was spending time with such a wonderful peer group. Back at home, people think I'm rather strange for being so interested in politics and being more excited for a presidential debate than a football game. However, I did not feel out of place with all the other delegates, even though we came from completely different regions all over the country. Most of these people had similar aspirations and a similar sense of responsibility relating to both school and involvement in our individual communities. While it was true that we all shared a wide variety of different ideologies, we were able to set our opinions aside and simply enjoy each other's company while having a lot of fun. Perhaps it would be a good idea for all members of Congress to have a bipartisan dance party every now and then.

Overall, this experience has definitely increased my interest in government, especially the judicial branch. I was very excited to visit the Supreme Court building and speak with such esteemed judges as Former Judge Robert Henry and Justice Clarence Thomas. They were very knowledgeable and intimidating men but at the same time kind and much more personable than I had imagined. I know I would love to be a clerk for a judge someday and maybe even an actual judge. Something important that I gained from this experience is that all of these powerful figures were once ordinary people like me and the rest of the delegates, but they had the inspiration and determination to accomplish their goals and accept such important responsibilities. I hope to follow their example.

Eamon Ormseth attended Charles M. Russell High School in Great Falls, Montana

One day in February, I casually logged onto Facebook, forgetting that the day earlier I had finally been tracked down and asked to join 'USSYP 2011.' So, naturally, the 50 notifications I had astounded me. As I browsed the group's page further, I was astonished by the breadth of knowledge and level of activity displayed by my fellow delegates. I felt like a kid in a candy shop; except this candy shop was filled with

political debate and candid discussion. Fortunately, this moment of amazement at USSYP was only the first of many...

The minute I stepped in[to] the hotel, I knew that this week would change me. I soon met my mentor, Captain Rocky Liesman, and our mentor group and we all quickly became friends. In fact, we bonded so closely, we called ourselves the “bros.” By the end of the week, we were bantering back and forth like we had known each other for years.

The policy addresses and speeches showed me a side of Washington I had never known. Secretary of Senate Nancy Erickson and Senate Parliamentarian Alan Frumin’s brief histories of the Senate were quite enlightening. I found Associate Justice Clarence Thomas’s candid manner and humble attitude particularly inspiring. His humility was captured by the numerous times he simply said, “I do not know.” He also revealed a pleasantly surprising humorous side. From “Don’t Youtube me, bro” to “I liked being black. I liked it before it was cool.” Justice Thomas showed us that even the men holding the highest governmental offices can be down to earth. I distinctly remember watching President Obama swagger into the East Room and the watching eyes of all 104 of us. In fact, I don’t believe that any of us blinked. The diversity of topics covered in the speeches we heard was quite incredible, but I felt that common to every speaker was a passion for this country – a passion for the great experiment that is American democracy.

Honestly, it would be impossible to pick a favorite part of this week. I have never seen passionate political debates go hand in hand with wild dancing and spontaneous singing. I have never asked a question of a political leader. But then, what else during that week was normal? We had personal contact with our American leaders and I found that these leaders are indeed amazing people. We can be these amazing people - they said it themselves!

USSYP will forever hold a place in my heart. I am deeply indebted to Rayne, Lynn, the USSYP staff, our military mentors, and the Hearst Foundations. Without them, Washington Week would have been merely Senate Resolution 324. During that surreal morning goodbye, I felt a twang of sadness and hope; sadness because I had to leave so many new friends - hope because I knew that I would see these people in the future.

The link to the entire 2011 Yearbook can be found at:

http://www.ussenateyouth.org/pdf/USSYP_2011_Yearbook.pdf